

Message for The Third Sunday after Easter. April 26, 2020

Greetings my friends. He is risen! He is risen indeed!

One of the most common comments I receive when visiting at the hospital or at times when visiting a grieving family is, "I know things are bad for us, but when I look around, I see that there are others worse off than we are." Does that ring a bell for you?

How true that was for we Canadians this week. We've lost so many, particularly beloved seniors because of this virus and have been unable to grieve in the ways that we usually do and that hurts.

But then there is Nova Scotia. Many people of various ages randomly killed for no apparent reason. Our brains can't make any sense of it. Just when things were as bad as we have ever seen them, there is worse.

And so now we sit in our isolation with our heads spinning with disbelief, wondering what has happened to our world. Try as we can, we seem unable to grasp the situation.

The lectionary reading for this Sunday is that very interesting story about two disciples walking to a town called Emmaus. Some of you will be familiar with this story, some not. You can find it in Luke, Chapter 24:13-35. If you want the actual text I will let you read it for yourself. I'm going to give you a paraphrase from my understanding.

On the same day as Jesus' resurrection, two followers of Jesus were walking along a road that leading to Emmaus, a town about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were not a happy pair. The journey did not seem long because they were so absorbed in conversation. The last few days had thoroughly confused them and they were deep in confused grief. They hardly noticed when an unannounced eavesdropper joined them on their journey, but for some reason they didn't recognize him. He interrupted them, "What's up?" They glared at him and said, "You gotta be kidding! Where have you been?"

Then they told him the story from beginning to end, finishing with the strange tale of the women who found an empty tomb.

Well the eavesdropper seemed to know more than they thought. "You're rather dim-witted aren't you? Why don't you know about this? It was all laid out for you by the prophets."

As they came to the edge of the village, they invited him to join them for supper. When he took the bread and blessed it, their brains began to function and they recognized him. At that point he disappeared.

I want you to use your imagination today. Close your eyes for a moment and get this picture in your mind of the disciples and Jesus on that road. Surely we recognize Jesus, just from the fact that he is such a good listener. We have no idea how long he was walking with them before they noticed him. He has let the disciples talk about their fears and anxieties. He lets them grieve and mourn. They pour out their crisis and doubts.

He shares a meal with them and patiently guides them from helplessness to celebration. he nourishes the two disciples in faith, so that they can see his real presence in the breaking of bread. They are disciples, so they offer hospitality. That hospitality transcends their self-concern, sadness and slowness of heart.

One of the major questions about this story always raised by theologians is how it was that the disciples didn't recognize Jesus. It does seem odd. Well first of all we need to remember that this story was written quite some time after the event. We can't be certain that all the facts are accurate. I think it is told this way to emphasize the disciples' self-absorption with their world-gone-amuck. Everything for which they had been hoping was turned upside down and inside out. Life for them at this point was a hopeless mess. They were, after all, heading to Emmaus. What was there for them?

Perhaps it was home, which is always a good place to go when you feel confused and hopeless, but it sure wasn't a place to establish the new reign of God promised by Jesus. That was behind them, in Jerusalem, as far as they could see.

There is an irony here. They were searching for truth on their journey, but didn't realize that Truth was walking beside them! Their desire was for answers for their situation when his desire was for them to have the answer- Himself!

The Easter event was to show that sorrow is the night, but there is joy in the morning and these two downcast disciples needed to see and live that truth. They needed to see with their hearts and minds before with their eyes. Perhaps we do too.

We are certainly living with our own dark nights. Let us remember that Jesus walks as a friend with us on this, our journey. He emphatically listens to our sorrows and hesitations and doubts. He spends quality time accompanying us through the process of inner healing.

May we see with our hearts and minds what we cannot see with our eyes.

Hear these words from Voices United. (#166)

*Joy comes with the dawn, joy comes with the morning sun,
Joy springs from the tomb and scatters the night with her song,
Joy comes with the dawn.*

Weeping may come, weeping may come in the night, when dark shadows cloud our sight.

*Sorrow will turn, sorrow will turn into song and God's laughter make us strong.
We will rejoice, we will rejoice and give praise, to the one who brings us grace.*

*Joy comes with the dawn, joy comes with the morning sun,
Joy springs from the tomb and scatters the night with her song,
Joy comes with the dawn.*

And the people said.....

Will you pray with me.....

We are moulded, each one of us, in the image of God and within our souls there is a fingerprint none can erase. In this fractured world, we cry out in pain, scarred by our grief, our tears, our fear.

We remember that Jesus travelled to towns and villages curing every disease and illness. At his command the sick were made well. Come to us now in the midst of this global spread of the corona virus that we might experience healing love through quality medical care.

Heal us from the fear that prevents nations from working together, side by side in this time of uncertainty and sorrow. Be with families of those who are sick and have died that they might know your peace.

We pray for families torn apart by the terrible shooting in Nova Scotia. We pray for the rescuers, finding survivors alongside bodies. We give thanks for their courage and undaunted hopefulness.

We pray for recovery for our world and the whole world in years to come, for restoration, generosity and healing closure.

In the midst of our "situation", you are the living water, the bread of life, the one who suffered, died and brought the hope that there is more to life than this.

Bless all who are in despair and dark places that they might look to you for assurance, comfort and peace.

This we pray in the name of the one who taught us to pray, Our Father.....

Benediction

Did you know that Wednesday was Earth Day? In the midst of everything that's happening it tends to get lost. It was great to see so many young people on the internet still focussing attention there. It is also neat to see that a good side effect of this virus is how it is healing the earth itself. I saw a piece on the news last night that showed how animals are now moving into the spaces that people have had to vacate. Hopefully there will be other benefits as well.

I found this thought that I share with you as a blessing.

*When this is over,
May we never again,
Take for granted
A handshake with a stranger
Full shelves at the store
Conversations with neighbours
A crowded theatre
Friday night out
The taste of communion
A routine checkup
The school rush each morning
Coffee with a friend
The stadium roaring
Each deep breath
A boring Tuesday
Life itself.*

*When this ends
May we find
That we have become
More like the people
We wanted to be
We were called to be
We hoped to be
And may we stay
That way- better
For each other
Because of the worst.*

(Laura Kelly Fanucci)

Amen and Amen

Take care of your selves, my friends, Rick